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# New dimension in Malaysia-China relations

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**TOWARDS THE FUTURE:** Nations require new insights, strategies to work together

**B**Y all accounts, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has propitiously timed his visit to China to coincide with the cooling breeze of the north-east monsoon now blowing strongly westwards from East Asia. Buoyed by the welcoming winds, both sides are expected to embark on building strong foundations for Malaysia-China relations to prosper.



**Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak** viewing a model of Bandar Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur in June. File pic

In geopolitical terms, this visit will add a new dimension to the relations. On one side, there is the gradual retreat of the United States from the region and perhaps the world. The final decision will rest with whoever is elected US president on Nov 8. On the other side, countries in the region will have to contend with the factor of the rise of China.

For Najib, good relations with China in this new century require new insights and strategies to work together. In their discussions, the two sides will need to pay attention to three significant elements that will decide the course of future relations between the two — time, memory and planning.

While time is of the essence to Malaysia, China is used to playing the “waiting” game. Both sides could bear with the memories of past history over their relations, but trust has been developed between the two over their dealings in settling the communist insurgency problem in the 1960s, and presently, the yet to be settled airline disappearance incident of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370. The plane carried a majority of Chinese passengers.

Cooperation and understanding of one another’s viewpoints and priorities have been evolving between the two countries in the hope that a complete closure of the air tragedy and its victims could be achieved to

the satisfaction of all. Matters of planning for the future will no doubt be high on the agenda as the two countries prepare to confront the difficult world economic and political situations in the coming years.

Topmost in the prime minister’s mind must surely be issues concerning high technology, defence industries, education, trade and tourism. China has excelled beyond expectations in the first two areas. Malaysia can hope to embark on institutional collaboration, corporate investments, joint projects and economic facilitation with China as proven by the examples reported.

Already, the Chinese presence is seen in port development, construction and engineering projects, railways, banking, communications and tourism development.

The most recent development has been the business tie-up between China’s Internet tech giant Huawei and I-City Development in Shah Alam. Other examples are the Kuantan Port expansion, tourism development in Pulau Melaka and the development of Bandar Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur.

In return, Malaysia can offer its expertise in Islamic banking, halal food management and technical and vocational training. On a much bigger scale, products like gloves and condoms, palm oil for cooking and pharmaceutical uses, petroleum and chemical industries for industrial production and wood furniture production, especially from rubberwood, can be exported to China and this can contribute to future growth in trade and economic exchanges.

As a final point in assessing the future scenario that is going to emerge in the years to come in the region, it is fair to say that Malaysia will find itself caught in the middle if a US-China confrontation were to take place.

As the coordinator on the Asean side for relations with the US, she is required to present the Asean position on future issues to both sides. At the same time, as we are all aware, Malaysia maintains very good relations with China, which may prevent her from doing anything that may jeopardise this.

Under the circumstance and as presented in the analysis above, Malaysia’s adroit diplomacy may be called upon to dissuade the US from “advancing any further” and persuade China to go for economic gains instead.

[info@drazharikarim.com](mailto:info@drazharikarim.com)

**The writer** is a retired Malaysian ambassador, former associate professor at Universiti Sains Malaysia and lecturer at Universiti Teknologi MARA, and now a futurist thinker

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